

Results and Challenges of Public Policies for Water Management and the Social and Solidarity Economy in Venezuela.

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INTRODUCTION

We are aware of the ongoing debate about the definitions of Social Economy and Solidarity Economy. Until today there is no consensual agreement on these definitions and this has implications for public policies and programs (B. Diaz 2008). In the opinion of some authors, the "social economy" construct should include only economic organizations, while others propose to include voluntary non-profit organizations; or "Non-profit Organizations of Social Usefulness" (ONLUS) as it is currently said.

From our point of view - relying on definitions developed in the field of "Latin American Network of Researchers in Social and Solidarity Economy " (RILESS) - the "Water Technical Tables in Local Communities" (MTA) may be considered as an example of "Solidarity Economy" provided they comply with the principles of autonomous community organizations and with the other principles established by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA: 1995) with respect to the "Cooperative Identity". The MTA is an example of community organization to coordinate the efforts of people targeted to improve the drinking water services, administered by the public water enterprises; under the Venezuelan case by the Venezuelan Hydrological Company (C.A. Hidrológica Venezolana - HIDROVEN)⁶ and its affiliates.

As expressed in the document⁷ of the Coalition of the MTA, "Techniques Water

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⁶HIDROVEN It was founded in 1990 on the occasion of the restructuring of the former Institute of Sanitary Works INOS.

⁷<http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session12/VE/CMTA-CoalicionMesasTecnicasAgua-spa.pdf>
Consultado en internet en fecha 10 de agosto 2016

tables are a type of grass root organization, born between 1993 and 1996 as a need of the most affected rural and urban populations, formerly excluded from access to drinking water service"(p.1:4); which today represent some of the different instruments⁸ for empowerment; that is, transferring power to the people in the field of the so-called "Bolivarian Revolution".

However, for the purposes of this paper, we are interested in studying the MTA as organizations of the Social and Solidarity Economy (OESS's) in the field of the complex water problem in Venezuela which, according to Arnoldo José Gabaldón "needs a new administrative, financial, technical and scientific deal, much more demanding than the one that it is currently put to it"(USB: 2010). Besides the aspects mentioned by this Venezuelan environmental expert, from our point of view, to achieve a truly sustainable development it is necessary to include the active participation of organized communities "to improve the service, by using the principle of responsibility, co-management, volunteer work, solidarity, promoting access to drinking water as a fundamental human right, fighting poverty and social exclusion through active starring participation of people's power "(Coalition MTA: 2016).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WATER INDUSTRY IN VENEZUELA.

Venezuela has a large availability of water; however, the most of this potential is located in the less populated geographic areas. Some water operators serve large areas, while others are in areas of high population density. There are also differences regarding altitude and temperature in the area covered by each water operator. These and other features contribute to achieve remarkable differences regarding the performance of the operators and water quality in between the geographical areas.

Currently, the supply of drinking water and wastewater collection is coordinated by the state owned company HIDROVEN, which acts as a governing body in the field of

⁸Círculos Bolivarianos, Nuevas Cooperativas, Núcleos de Desarrollo Endógeno (NUDE), Empresas de Producción Social (EPS), Mecanismos de Presupuestos Participativos, Bancos Comunales, Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción (CLAP), entre otros.

drinking water supply, collection and treatment of sewage and maintenance of urban drainage systems. HIDROVEN also issues guidelines for all that relates to the expansion of water systems in the country. From the administrative point of view, HIDROVEN coordinates 18 public companies, of which: 11 are centralized, depending on the central government and are subsidiaries of HIDROVEN; 6 are decentralized, depending on local governments (regional states and / or municipalities); and 1 operates under the guide of the central government.

Subsidiaries and decentralized water companies which are governed and supervised by HIDROVEN, can be located in the next Venezuelan map. Each regional water company covers between one and three out of the 23 states. The responsibility for setting tariffs within the maximum levels set by the national government is shared by regional water operators and municipalities. They are as follows:

HIDROCAPITAL, covers the Capital District and Miranda and Vargas states.

Instituto Municipal Aguas de Sucre (IMAS) covers Miranda state.

HIDROANDES, covers Barinas and Trujillo states.

HIDROBOLÍVAR, covers Bolívar state.

HIDROCARIBE, covers Anzoátegui, Nueva Esparta and Sucre states.

HIDROCENTRO, covers Aragua and Carabobo states.

HIDROFALCÓN, covers Falcón state.

HIDROLAGO, covers Zulia state.

HIDROLLANOS, covers Apure state.

HIDROPÁEZ, covers Guárico state.

HIDROSUROESTE, covers Táchira state.

HIDROLARA, covers Lara state.

CVG-GOSH, covers Amazonas and Delta Amacuro state.

Aguas de Mérida, covers Merida state

Aguas de Ejido, covers Ejido Municipality in Merida state

Aguas de Monagas, covers Monagas state

Aguas de Cojedes, covers Cojedes state

Aguas de Portuguesa, covers Portuguesa state

Aguas de Yaracuy, covers Yaracuy state



HIDROVEN and its affiliated regional companies are the direct owners of the central infrastructure for water supply of municipal and state enterprises. Rural water systems are administered by community organizations, including some cooperatives. In 2003, some 20 urban cooperatives also provided water services to neighbourhoods. The government of Hugo Chavez promoted this kind of "community experiences", which also include the so called Technical Tables Water (MTA) associations involved in monitoring networks of water supply and sanitation in neighbourhoods, which include identification and reducing leaks and illegal connections. In 2007, Venezuela had about 2.800 technical water tables of this type. (Cfr. Agua Potable y Saneamiento en Venezuela. WIKIPEDIA Consulted 20.08.2016).

In the Table N° 1 we can summarize - following Lenny Escalona et al. (2009) - the most important differences between centralized and decentralized water enterprises.

TABLE N° 1 – DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WATER COMPANIES IN VENEZUELA

CENTRALIZED	DECENTRALIZED
PROPERTY	
Sole shareholder : the State through HIDROVEN	Several shareholders : HIDROVEN and local governments (governments and / or municipalities)
DECISION MAKING	
The board of HIDROVEN, as sole shareholder	Consensual decisions between HIDROVEN (central government) and local governments (governments and / or municipalities)
RESOURCES	
Own income, for services rendered and collection of contributions from central government	Own income, collection services and some investments of regional and / or municipal governments
ADMINISTRATION	
They are directly dependent of HIDROVEN, they are their "affiliates"	They have no direct relationship with HIDROVEN, but must operate within national plans
PERSONAL	
Employees of centralized companies are considered "PUBLIC SERVANTS"	Employees of decentralized companies are governed by labour legislation and are considered "WORKERS EMPLOYEES"

Source: Own writing

To understand the contents in the table N°1, it is important to emphasize that the figure of "public servants" allows the state to respond, appropriate and timely, the multiplicity of demands from an environment characterized by complexity and rapid change, which requires of an agile and flexible administrative apparatus, able to respond to such demands, that is, assuming that a "public servant" has a higher level of commitment than a simple "employee". Moreover, the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Constitution of 1999) states that "public servants" must serve to the state and not to a political partiality; therefore, the appointment and removal of the public servant can not be determined by political affiliation or orientation.

WATER TABLES TECHNIQUES (MTA)

Water Technical Tables (MTA) are organizations promoted by the State and formed in accordance with the Civil Code, to ensure the participation of users monitoring the quality, speed and coverage of water services.

According to the Organic Law for the provision of water and sanitation services (2001), their functions are:

- 1) To represent communities and organized neighbourhood groups dealing with HIDROVEN and its subsidiaries for service providers.
- 2) To review the investments carried out for the development of water services.
- 3) To disseminate information on issues related to the provision of water services.
- 4) To guide the community participation in the development and monitoring of water service delivery.
- 5) To propose plans and programs that could benefit water subscribers.
- 6) To promote collaboration with service providers in the above matters and any related in order to allow adequately meet the water needs of local communities.

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The MTA have a strong territorial reference, and they should be part of the Communal Council. They are aimed at to stimulate accountability and social control by the communities in order to improve the performance of water services to meet the needs of the community and improve the quality of life of people. MTA at the same time provide space to build and to exercise responsible citizenship.

In some cases, the MTA are not only dedicated to solving problems with the drinking water, but also address other issues, drawing on the experience to become, in several cases, the leading organization of the community, the communal councils, which in turn are, by definition, the system base of Communes, supposedly to be the basis of the Bolivarian socialism of the 21st century according to the National Development Plan 2013-2019. The MTA prepare community projects that are aimed at solving community problems, to obtain financing. This money was previously spent directly by the MTA,

mainly for the construction of water projects; although today the money for the water project is deposited in the bank account of the Communal Council, which is in charge of the water project and controls the funds.

Regarding their quantitative growth, by the year 2006 there were 2.783 MTA officially recorded, almost three times more than in 2005. And for 2010, there were 8.109 MTA, most of them in centralized water companies. Currently, despite the call of the "First National Congress of the MTA" - held in San Antonio de Los Altos (Edo Miranda.) Between October 31 and November 1st, 2015 - (cf. www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve 28-10-2015) that aimed to relaunch the MTA under the National Development Plan together with the declaration of "access to water resources" as a "fundamental human right", there is not available updated data about the number of existing and operational MTA.

In financial and economic aspects, according to the report by the "Coalition MTA" "In January of 2011, the Water Technical Tables had been allocated a total of Bs. 481.052.043 (four hundred and eighty one million fifty two thousand and forty three Bolivars) for the execution of 1.556 drinking and sanitation water projects, of which 1.097 were culminated and 459 are running, benefiting a population of 1.526.339 inhabitants with completed projects. When all these the projects could be ended up it is estimated a total of 2.973.935 inhabitants with direct benefits of these projects."

The MTA have had different results in their performance. Some researchers claim (Lacabana et al, 2.008) that due to the performance of the Bolivarian National Constitution and the MTA it has been reached the Millennium Development Goals of halving the population without access to water ten years in advance and improved coverage of wastewater collection.

However, based on the available numbers, it can be estimated that these projects have actually achieved only 5% of the total population - estimated at 30.000.000 people - and completing ongoing projects it is expected to reach 10%, investing an average of Bs⁹ 161 per beneficiary.

⁹ 37,44\$ at the official Exchange rate for the year 2011 (Bs/\$ = 4,30)

In addition (cf. Margarita Lopez Maya. 2011), many of these MTA projects lost their objectives and MTA have engaged in other activities, especially in relation to political control of the population in the territories and disputes of Communal Councils. So participation of the MTA members stopped being voluntary, in many cases, and, when monetary compensation began to diminish - these neighbours stopped participating in the management of the community project.

Moreover, beyond the aspects of socio political management - as it has pointed out Arnaldo José Gabaldón - the water problem is very complex and, recently, "the complaint that the water is dirty is repeated in several regions of Venezuela, especially at this time when drought has increased rationing throughout the country " (BBC-Mundo and El Nacional: 04-02-2016)¹⁰.

The BBC report notes that "According to *ENCOVI* 2015 survey, in which three universities studied the quality of life of Venezuelans, 81% of households have aqueduct, while 38% do not have continuous access to water."

The government recognizes that the current water problem is serious, both in quantity and quality; however, they do not take full responsibility for the situation, and say that drought is caused by the natural phenomenon known as "El Niño". On the contrary, many engineers and environmental experts - as said Arnaldo José Gabaldón - claim that, despite the problems identified by the managers of HIDROVEN, it is essential to rebuild the national hydrological service, basing this reconstruction on the planner spirit of the "Commission of the National Plan for Water Resources Utilization" founded in 1967 (cfr. Gabaldón: 2010).

As a result of this situation, the recent statement of the BBC-World says that in Venezuela has become very common to see street closures and national roads in protest for cuts of drinking water for days and even weeks.

¹⁰¿Por qué el agua en Venezuela llega "hedionda y amarillenta"? BBC-Mundo y El Nacional, <http://www.el-nacional.com> (consultado el 15-08-2016)

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.

These considerations require deepening, without ideological blinders, the performance evaluation of the MTA as complementary tools to solve the water problem in Venezuela.

In general, regarding the MTA it can be said that the so-called "21st century socialism" model has been successful in terms "to strengthen the dynamics of organization and mobilization generated from below, providing an intermediate body, articulating and coordinating base organizations in popular communities "(Lopez Maya: 2010).

However, not everything can be considered positive or negative, it is necessary to consider the development of MTA in the field of promoting participatory democracy. Following the intervention of Diana Vegas (2012) (Executive Director of CESAP Social Group) at the National Meeting of Social Organizations - organized by the Catholic University Andres Bello (UCAB) – It can be said that there has been: "An extension of popular participation, but it is promoted in practice that this is passive, receiving and loyal to the official discourse and practices; extending the legal framework around new mechanisms and participatory possibilities, but some laws exceed the citizen and supersede the authority ". In addition, it highlights *"the social inclusion and political exclusion; social inclusion of excluded sectors: women, peasants, indigenous, disabled, elderly, but also dismantling of existing services and poor quality of today services.*

The long period of the Bolivarian Government System - from 1999 to the present - can be divided neatly into three stages: the first stage - which runs from 1999 to 2006, where the "leitmotif" was the promotion of participatory democracy; where among the first participatory innovations for co-management of public services, include: Water Techniques (MTA) Tables and Water Community Councils (CEC) (see Lopez Maya 2011.).

A second phase - from 2007 to 2010 - we might consider transition; this period begins with the re-election (December 2006) of President Chavez and is marked by the failed constitutional reform (2007) and the approval of the constitutional amendment

(2008) for indefinite re-election of the president and all public officers. In this period participatory democracy gradually becomes more directed, through the power of oil revenue managed by the state.

The third phase, currently underway, beginning in 2010 with the approval - by decree - of a package of laws up the formation of a new "communal State ", which - as stated by Margarita Lopez Maya (2012) - is a "no Liberal State" that in the name of direct participation, moves - on the contrary - to the re-centralization of Petro-State; instead of favouring the real empowerment of grassroots organizations and full citizenship of people.

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